

HOW INCLUSIVE IS OUR PROGRAM FOR LGBT+ PERSONS?

Introduction

The program has a long history of supporting LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and other gender and sexual minority) volunteers and staff.

In 2019 the program worked with international LGBT+ development and research and training specialists, Edge Effect, to review current practice and make recommendations for strengthening LGBT+ inclusion and support across the program and volunteer lifecycle.

This review followed on from the program's 2018 evaluation of volunteer diversity,¹ which identified support for LGBT+ persons and LGBT-focussed assignments as a priority. The 2018 evaluation indicated that further work was needed to identify enablers for LGBT+ persons to access the program and to develop proactive approaches to inclusion across the volunteer cycle, including recruitment, volunteer support and public diplomacy.

Methodology

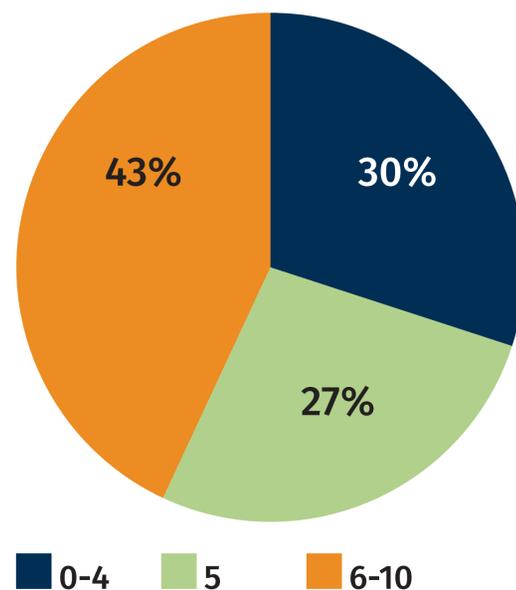
This review utilised a critical feminist methodology to identify and challenge the power relations that underpin marginalisation and restrict the potential for change. The collection and analysis of data used predominantly qualitative methods, with the exception of the quantitative aspects of the volunteer survey. Primary data was collected through interviews, surveys and a sense-making workshop, and secondary data was collected through a review of program documents and external literature.

Key informant interviews were undertaken with staff and volunteers and the findings drew heavily on this data.

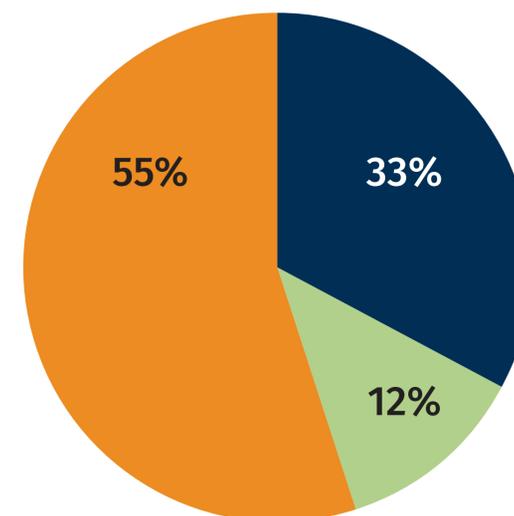
Staff interviews included: face-to-face interviews with ten Melbourne staff, online interviews with five Regional Directors, online interviews with six in-country staff, and an additional five staff interviewed by their country manager. Volunteer interviews were conducted with current and returned volunteers following self-nomination in the online survey, with support from regional and country staff, and the Returned Australian Volunteer Network (RAVN).

The review found that a significant number of LGBT+ volunteers did not feel safe on the program

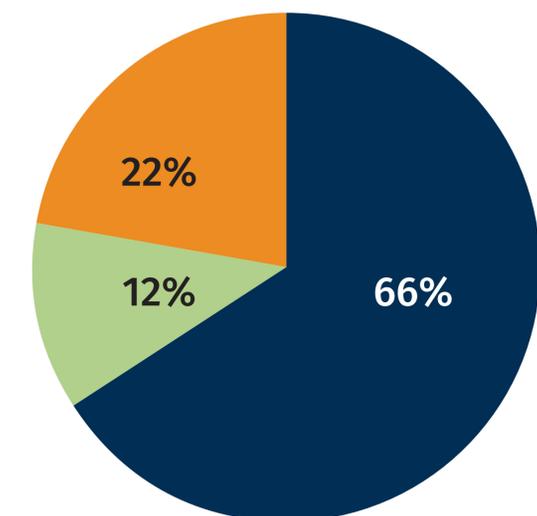
Felt safe reporting incidents through the program
(0 = not at all, 10 = completely)



Felt safe being in the program
(0 = not at all, 10 = completely)



Felt safe sharing sexual orientation or gender identity with partner organisation
(0 = not at all, 10 = completely)



Key Findings

The review builds on previous experience and papers to enhance LGBT+ inclusion across the program. It found that while the program is inclusive and supportive of LGBT+ persons in many ways, there are some key ways the program can be more inclusive.

The review found:

- LGBT+ inclusion in the program could be strengthened by further organisational support from AVI.
- A more systematic approach to LGBT+ inclusion is required, particularly during in-country and return lifecycle phases.
- Program staff and volunteers need training and mentoring to support safe, effective and equitable LGBT+ inclusion.
- Program staff and volunteers would benefit from access to country-contextual information to assist decision-making.
- Gaps in mental health provision and some physical health provision for LGBT+ volunteers.
- LGBT+ volunteers have experienced discrimination, harassment and assault on assignments, felt unsafe, and may not trust or use program staff or reporting processes.
- There is a demand for a LGBT+ volunteer network.
- Program communications and recruitment strategies do not intentionally engage LGBT+ persons.
- Specific initiatives for disability and other types of inclusion (including partnerships and assignments) could be adapted to support LGBT+ inclusion.

What's next?

The review's findings and recommendations were welcomed by the program and DFAT, and has led to subsequent consultations to develop a clear action plan and framework for strengthening LGBT+ inclusion across the entire program.

The program has developed specific activities in five key areas to take forward some of the recommendations in the 19/20 financial year, annual planning discussions for 20/21, and beyond:

1. Develop a statement of intent which articulates and socialises a vision and commitment to diverse LGBT+ inclusion.
2. Map existing learning opportunities to develop a learning plan for building capacity of volunteers, staff and partner organisations on LGBT+ inclusion.
3. Strengthen health and mental health support.
4. Establish and support a diverse LGBT+ volunteer network.
5. Revise country security plans and other documents as part of an integrated approach to risk management, recruitment, training for staff and support to volunteers regarding issues faced by people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and other aspects of LGBT+.
6. Strengthen public diplomacy and communications representing people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and other aspects of LGBT+.
7. Strengthen partnerships with diverse LGBT+ organisations in Australia and assignment countries, and provide specific opportunities for diverse LGBT+ volunteers.

Acknowledgements

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